



Cuyahoga Valley National Park

Final White-tailed Deer Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Why is a Deer Management Plan needed?

Cuyahoga Valley National Park (park) began to address the issues associated with excessive deer numbers and browsing impacts over 20 years ago, and since then has been conducting studies of both deer density and the effects of deer browsing on park resources. Deer density has varied and has decreased in many areas of the park in recent years, but there are large annual fluctuations, and the densities remain above the levels that are considered desirable for forest regeneration. Long-term ecological studies at the park have found that deer browsing is limiting the growth of tree seedlings, limiting the height of tree seedlings, and suppressing the growth of native groundcover. Among other reasons, a deer management plan is needed to ensure that deer do not become the dominant force in the ecosystem adversely impacting forest regeneration, sensitive vegetation, and other wildlife.

How many deer are in the park?

Recent estimates of deer density across the park indicate an average of 40 deer/ square mile (1,669 deer). Deer densities reached a high point in 2002, when they were estimated up to 142 deer/ square mile in one area of the park. Numbers have decreased overall in the last 10 years, but still remain at a level that can cause adverse ecological impacts.

What does NPS think is the “right” number of deer?

Plan success is not measured by the number of deer but by the success of forest regeneration. Therefore, the “right” number of deer will be determined based on the ability of the forest to regenerate. The park has identified a range of 15 to 30 deer per square mile as the initial deer density goal for this Final Plan/EIS, which was based on review of relevant scientific studies on the effects of deer on vegetation, and the management approaches used in other local parks. The NPS believes this density range will allow the forest to regenerate.

Have deer herd reductions by the Metroparks districts affected deer populations in the park? Deer reduction efforts on non-federal properties within the park boundary undoubtedly reduce deer populations in those locations and may have influenced decreasing population trends in adjacent locations within the park. However, most of our deer population survey routes do not coincide with locations where deer reduction has occurred, and deer densities on park land remain at levels that can cause adverse ecological impacts.

What is an Environmental Impact Statement?

An Environmental impact statement (EIS) is a detailed environmental review prepared pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) for federal actions that may significantly affect the quality of the human environment. An EIS provides agency decision-makers and the public an assessment of the environmental consequences of potential federal actions. The ultimate purpose of an EIS is to engage the public in agency decision making and provide the information that decision-makers need to make informed decisions.

Where are we in the EIS process?

Following the release of the Draft Plan/EIS, a 60-day public comment period was open between July 26, 2013, and September 24, 2013. During the comment period, 68 pieces of correspondence were received, yielding a total of 214 individual comments. All comments received were carefully considered. The Final Plan/EIS provides responses to substantive comments received and incorporates those comments and suggested revisions into the text of the Final Plan/EIS where appropriate.

The Final Plan/EIS has been released. We are now in the midst of a 30-day no-action period, which began the date the EPA Notice of Availability was published in the Federal Register (December 5th). After the 30-day no-action period, a Record of Decision (ROD) that documents the alternative that is selected for implementation will be signed by the Regional Director of the NPS Midwest Region.

What alternatives are being considered for managing deer?

The Final Plan/EIS considers four alternatives for the management of white-tailed deer at Cuyahoga Valley National Park.

Under *Alternative A (No Action)*, existing management actions would continue, including deer and vegetation monitoring, data management, and research. No new actions would occur to reduce the effects of deer overbrowsing.

Alternative B (Combined Non-lethal Actions) would include all actions described under Alternative A, and would incorporate a combination of nonlethal actions, including use of large-scale deer fencing to allow for forest regeneration. In addition, nonsurgical reproductive control of does would be used to restrict population growth when this technology meets certain criteria.

Alternative C (Lethal Actions) would include all actions described under Alternative A, and would allow for lethal deer management actions (sharpshooting with firearms or capture and euthanasia of individual deer) to reduce the herd size.

Alternative D (Combined Lethal and Non-lethal Actions) is the NPS preferred alternative. Alternative D would include all actions described under Alternative A, and would incorporate a combination of lethal and nonlethal actions from Alternatives B and C. These actions would include the initial reduction of the deer herd through sharpshooting with firearms or limited capture and euthanasia. Population maintenance could then be conducted either by nonsurgical reproductive control methods, if certain criteria are met, or by sharpshooting.

When will deer management begin?

NPS could begin to implement the selected alternative after the ROD is signed and made available to the public.

Why was public hunting not analyzed as an alternative?

Public hunting is inconsistent with existing laws, policies, and regulations for Cuyahoga Valley National Park and all other units of the national park system where hunting is not authorized. Changing these longstanding service-wide policies and regulations regarding hunting in parks is beyond the scope of this plan/EIS and inconsistent with the purposes of this park. Therefore, public hunting was considered but not carried forward for analysis.

Have other National Park units prepared white-tailed deer management plans?

The issues related to impacts of high white-tailed deer populations are not unique to Cuyahoga Valley National Park. This is an environmental concern throughout the eastern United States. Deer management plans/EISs have been completed and are being implemented in the following eastern parks:

- Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore (Porter, Indiana)
- Catoctin Mountain Park (Thurmont, Maryland)
- Rock Creek Park (Washington, DC)
- Valley Forge National Historic Park (King of Prussia, PA)

Where can I get a copy of the Final Plan/EIS?

A digital copy of the Final Plan/EIS can be downloaded from the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) web site at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/CUVAdeerplan>. A limited number of hard copies are available at the park and may be picked up in-person or obtained by making a request in writing to Superintendent, Attn: Deer Management Plan, Cuyahoga Valley National Park, 15610 Vaughn Road, Brecksville, Ohio 44141, or by telephone at 440-546-5903.

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